

Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00
SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07 L-03
PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 ACDA-12 IO-13 OMB-01
HA-05 EB-08 /087 W
-----118021 071909Z /41

O P 071810Z NOV 77
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1335
INFO AMCONSUL QUEBEC IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL MONTREAL PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PRIORITY
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E.O. 22652: GDS
TAGS: CA, FR
SUBJECT: LEVESQUE'S VISIT TO FRANCE

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REF: A) QUEBEC 424 B) MONTREAL 1803 AND PREVIOUS
C) PARIS 30737

1. SUMMARY: LEVESQUE'S THREE-DAY OFFICIAL VISIT TO
FRANCE MAINTAINED ONLY THE BAREST FIG LEAF DECORUM.
BOTH SIDES DID STOP SHORT OF REITERATING DE GAULLE'S
CRY FOR A FREE QUEBEC. THE GOVERNMENT ALSO MADE

SURE THAT LEVESQUE DID NOT ADDRESS THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. MOREOVER, AS A RESULT OF LAST-MINUTE, APPARENTLY DIFFICULT NEGOTIATIONS THE COMMUNIQUE REMAINED MODEST IN TONE, IF NOT IN SCOPE. IN PARTICULAR IT DID NOT REPEAT LEVESQUE'S PRESS CONFERENCE PROCLAMATION, SPECIALLY GALLING TO THE CANADIAN EMBASSY, OF A NEW "TRIANGULAR RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN QUEBEC, PARIS AND OTTAWA", WHOSE "BASE" WAS THE PARIS-QUEBEC, LINE, AND TO WHICH OTTAWA WOULD "HAVE TO ADJUST".

OTHERWISE, HOWEVER, THE VISIT WAS AN UNABASHED LOVE FEAST BETWEEN THE FRENCH MAJORITY AND THEIR VISITOR AN ELYSEE SOURCE SAYS THIS EMOTIONAL INTENSITY WAS "SPONTANEOUS" AND IS NOW SHARED BY GISCARD. OTHERS, WHO RECALL GISCARD'S EARLIER OPPOSITION TO DE GAULLE'S ENTHUSIASM FOR QUEBEC ARE CONVINCED IT WAS GISCARD'S WAY OF TRYING TO TAKE THE PLAY AWAY FROM THE GAULLISTS AND TO EXPLOIT DOMESTIC NATIONALIST SENTIMENT -- AT THE PRICE OF FRENCH RELATIONS WITH OTTAWA WHICH SENIOR QUAI OFFICIALS DEPLORE. BE THAT AS IT MAY THE MESSAGE OF FRENCH "SYMPATHY" AND "UNDERSTANDING" FOR QUEBEC'S CAUSE CAME THROUGH UNMISTAKABLY: IN THE PROGRAM WHICH EXCEEDED THAT OFFERED MOST HEADS OF STATE; IN INNUMERABLE GESTURES AND ALLUSIONS SUCH AS LEVESQUE'S ENTRANCE INTO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BY THE SEINE STEPS, NOT USED OFFICIALLY FOR 150 YEARS; IN THE PLAYING OF

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"ALOUETTE" BY THE ELYSEE'S BAND ON HIS ARRIVAL; IN GISCARD'S REFERENCE TO THE "SPRING WHICH FOLLOWS A LONG WINTER", AND IN THE BESTOWING OF THE LEGION D'HONNEUR, WHICH CANADA HAD NOT AUTHORIZED AND PROMPTLY PROTESTED. MOST IMPORTANT AND DISTURBING TO THE CANADIANS HERE, HOWEVER, WHO MAINTAINED A PAINED CORRECTNESS, WAS THE UNVEILING, DURING THE VISIT, OF A MORE INTENSE FRENCH RELATIONSHIP TO QUEBEC THROUGH AN ANNUAL EXCHANGE OF PRIME MINISTERIAL VISITS, THUS INSTITUTIONALIZING FRANCE'S SYMBOLIC SPONSORSHIP OF QUEBEC'S CAUSE.

FOR THE MAJORITY OF FRENCHMEN THE THREE DAYS OF PLAYING BIG BROTHER TO LEVESQUE MADE FOR A PLEASANTLY SELF-INDULGENT BINGE OF NATIONALISM. THERE WERE, NEVERTHELESS, A NUMBER OF SOBER VOICES IN THE FRENCH PRESS WHO RECOGNIZED THAT FRANCE COULD DO LITTLE TO HELP QUEBEC IF CANADA DID DISINTEGRATE AND SHOULD THEREFORE NOT BE IRRESPONSIBLE. AN EVEN GREATER DISTANCE FROM THE GOINGS-ON WAS MAINTAINED BY THE FRENCH LEFT, WHICH SAT THIS ONE OUT -- TO THE EXTENT

THAT NOT EVEN A PERFUNCTORY MEETING BETWEEN
LEVESQUE

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PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 ACDA-12 IO-13 OMB-01
HA-05 EB-08 /087 W
-----118185 071911Z/41

O P 071810Z NOV 77
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MITTERRAND TOOK PLACE.

HERE IN FRANCE LEVESQUE'S VISIT WAS OF COURSE ONLY
AN INTERLUDE ALREADY BEING OVERTAKEN BY OTHER HEAD-
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LINE NEWS. HOWEVER, WE FEAR THAT GOF'S OPPORTUNISM
IN YIELDING TO DOMESTIC POLITICAL PRESSURE, TO
THE EXTENT IT DID, MAY HAVE HAD A GREAT IMPACT IN
QUEBEC. END SUMMARY

2. THE PROGRAM FOR QUEBEC PRIME MINISTER RENE LEVESQUE'S THREE DAY VISIT WHICH ENDED NOVEMBER 5 EXCEEDED IN SCOPE AND WARMTH THAT OFFERED MOST NATIONAL PRIME MINISTERS AND HEADS OF STATE AND CERTAINLY WENT FAR BEYOND THE RECEPTION ACCORDED TRUDEAU AND LEVESQUE'S PREDECESSORS. HE LAID A WREATH ON DE GAULLE'S TOMB WITH JUSTICE MINISTER PEYREFITTE; WAS HONORED BY THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY; WAS THE GUEST AT AN ASSEMBLY RECEPTION AT THE HOTEL LASSAY, WAS TWICE RECEIVED BY THE PRIME MINISTER FOR LONG TALKS; WAS OFFERED THE ELYSEE'S HONORS AND LUNCH BY Giscard, WHO THEN ACCORDED HIM THE LEGION D'HONNEUR, WHICH LEVESQUE PROMPTLY WORE WITHOUT CANADIAN GOVERNMENT PERMISSION; HAD NUMEROUS WORKING MEETINGS WITH A SERIES OF MINISTERS, INCLUDING GUIRINGAUD; AND WAS OF COURSE RECEIVED WITH SPECIAL ECLAT BY CHIRAC AT CITY HALL AS THE MAN WHO "WAS CARRYING OUT FOR QUEBEC WHAT DE GAULLE PREDICTED." TO TOP IT OFF BARRE WENT OUT PERSONALLY TO THE AIRPORT TO SEE HIM OFF.

3. THROUGHOUT THIS MARATHON LEVESQUE MANAGED TO SQUEEZE IN A TRULY ASTONISHING NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS WITH PRESS AND TELEVISION IN WHICH HIS LOW-KEY APPROACH GAINED CONSIDERABLE FRENCH PUBLIC SYMPATHY AS THE UNDER-DOGLERDER OF THE FRENCH IN CANADA, WHOSE "CAUSE" HAD TOO LONG BEEN FORGOTTEN.

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4. THE THEMES STRUCK ON BOTH SIDES SPARKLED WITH BARELY HALF-VEILED ALLUSIONS TO LEVESQUE'S HOPES FOR QUEBEC'S INDEPENDENCE AND FRENCH "COMPREHENSION", ALTHOUGH THE CALL FOR A "QUEBEC LIBRE" WAS NOT REPEATED ONLY RECALLED. AT THE AIRPORT ALREADY, LEVESQUE SPOKE OF FRENCH-QUEBEC RELATIONS AS THOSE OF "TWO EQUAL COUNTRIES, TWO STATES WHO FREELY AGREE TO COOPERATE ON ALL SECTORS...WHERE THIS IS ADVANTAGEOUS AND POSSIBLE." AT ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT EDGAR FAURE'S RECEPTION AT THE HOTEL LASSAY

(ATTENDED BY 600 GUESTS, OF WHOM ONLY 150, HOWEVER, WERE DEPUTIES, MOSTLY OF THE MAJORITY), HE RESPONDED TO FAURE'S MORE GUARDED REFERENCES TO THE "UNIVERSAL" VALUES REFLECTED IN QUEBEC'S EXPERIENCE, BY SAYING THAT HE WAS "INCREASINGLY SURE THAT A NEW COUNTRY WOULD SOON APPEAR DEMOCRATICALLY ON THE WORLD MAP." HE WAS THEN OVERHEARD AND QUOTED AS ASKING THE CANADIAN AMBASSADOR ON LEAVING, "WHAT'S THE MATTER, CRY-BABY?" IN TV INTERVIEWS, REFERRING TO THE QUEBEC REFERENDUM TO BE HELD IN TWO AND A HALF YEARS, HE SAID INTER ALIA THAT CANADIAN FEDERALISM "HAD HAD ITS DAY." HE WAS GUARDEDLY OPTIMISTIC OF EVOLVING US "COMPREHENSION" OF QUEBEC'S NEW IDENTITY, BUT LEFT NO DOUBT THAT US REACTIONS REMAINED ONE OF HIS MAJOR CONCERNS.

5. THE THEMES OF "SYMPATHY" AND "COMPREHENSION" CONTINUED TO CROP UP AT EVERY TURN. CHIRAC SAID LEVESQUE "INCARNATED THE ASPIRATIONS OF QUEBEC AND WILL KNOW "HOW TO LEAD HIS GREAT ENTERPRISE TO ITS END." BARRE SALUTED HIM AS THE REPRESENTATIVE OF A COUNTRY

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" WHICH WANTED TO AFFIRM ITS IDENTITY IN ENTERING AMBITIOUSLY INTO THE MODERN WORLD". EVEN GISCARD WAS MOVED IN HIS TOAST TO REFER TO THE "SPRING WHICH COMES AT LAST, NO MATTER HOW LONG THE WINTER;" TO CONFIDENTIAL

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SPEAK OF THE VISIT AS A "FAMILY REUNION", AND TO MAKE THE RATHER AMBIGUOUS PROMISE THAT "NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS, QUEBEC CAN COUNT ON THE FRATERNAL SYMPATHY OF FRANCE". THE SUBSEQUENT LACK OF GAULLIST CRITICISM OF GISCARD'S HANDLING OF THE VISIT SHOWED THAT GISCARD HAD INDEED DISTRIBUTED JUST ENOUGH MANNAH FOR THE QUEBECOIS TO SATISFY THEIR VIEWS.

6. ATMOSPHERICS APART, THE CONCRETE RESULTS OF THE VISIT ALSO WERE FAR FROM NEGIGIBLE AND ARE DISTURBING TO THE CANADIANS HERE. MOST IMPORTANT, IN TERMS OF ITS POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE,

IS THE AGREEMENT TO EXCHANGE ANNUAL VISITS OF PRIME MINISTERS. THE COMMUNIQUE BASES ITSELF IN THIS REGARD ON ARTICLE 1 OF THE PROCES VERBAL SIGNED BETWEEN FRANCE AND QUEBEC ON SEPT 14, 1967. WE DO NOT HAVE THIS TEXT. LE MONDE POINTS OUT, HOWEVER, THAT THIS DOCUMENT, SIGNED BY ALAIN PEYREFITTE AS DE GAULLE'S EDUCATION MINISTER, WAS NOT PUBLISHED; THAT GOF, IN THE CITED ARTICLE, ONLY "TOOK NOTE" OF QUEBEC'S SUGGESTION FOR A REGULAR EXCHANGE OF MINISTERIAL VISITS; THAT THERE WAS THEREFORE NO COMMITMENT; BUT THAT IN NO CASE WERE REGULAR PRIME MINISTERIAL VISITS FORESEEN.

7. IN NOW AGREEING TO SUCH A REGULAR EXCHANGE, GOF HAS TAKEN A MAJOR NEW STEP TOWARD ESTABLISHING A MORE REGULAR, ALMOST ORGANIC RELATION WITH QUEBEC, PARTICULARLY SINCE THE COMMUNIQUE INDICATED THAT PRIME MINISTERS WOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY OTHER MINISTERS CONCERNED WITH EXPANDED COOPERATION. THE

POLITICAL IMPLICATION OF COURSE IS THAT FRANCE'S
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IMPLIED SPONSORSHIP OF QUEBEC'S CONCERN WILL HENCEFORTH
BE AN ONGOING AFFAIR.

8. THE CANADIAN EMBASSY'S DCM HAS TOLD US OF HIS
CONCERN OVER THE ECONOMIC AGREEMENTS UNDER
DISCUSSION, PARTICULARLY AS REGARDS A JOINT FIVE-YEAR
COPPER EXPLORATION PROJECT. WHILE THERE ARE NO
OBJECTIONS TO DISCUSSING SUCH PROJECTS, THE CANADIANS
HERE CONSIDER THAT ANY FIRM AGREEMENTS, PARTICULARLY
INVOLVING PRICES, WOULD PROBABLY HAVE TO BE
CONSIDERED NULL AND VOID. THERE IS ALSO TALK IN THE
PRESS OF AN URANIUM DEAL. THE ONLY OTHER AGREEMENTS
MENTIONED IN THE COMMUNIQUE REFER TO INCREASES IN
CULTURAL EXCHANGE.

9. ALTHOUGH THE CANADIANS HERE SAY THAT THEY WILL
HAVE TO TAKE THEIR TIME TO MAKE A FULL ASSESSMENT OF
THE VISIT, THEY ARE EVIDENTLY TAKEN ABACK BY ITS LACK
OF RESTRAINT. THEY TOO HAD BEEN GIVEN THE IMPRESSION
BEFORE THE VISIT THAT THE SLOGANS "NON-INTERFERENCE BUT
NON-INDIFFERENCE" WOULD BE STRICTLY ADHERED TO, AT
LEAST BY GOF. THE CANADIAN DCM THINKS THAT THERE WERE
IN FACT DECISIVE LAST-MINUTE REVISIONS, (PROBABLY
DURING LEVESQUE'S ONE-WEEK UNOFFICIAL STAY WHICH
PRECEDED HIS OFFICIAL VISIT) WHICH LED TO A FURTHER
UPGRADING OF GOF'S APPROACH TO LEVESQUE.

10. FOR THE QUAI, WHICH HAS NO ILLUSIONS ABOUT THE
CAPACITIES OF A FREE QUEBEC, OR FRANCE'S ABILITY TO
SUPPORT IT, THE VISIT POSED PARTICULARLY PAINFUL
DILEMMAS. A SENIOR QUAI OFFICIAL DIRECTLY CONCERNED
WITH THE VISIT SAID THAT LEVESQUE NEGOTIATED ON THE
COMMUNIQUE TILL THE LAST MINUTE TO SQUEEZE OUT EVERY
POSSIBLE OUNCE OF BLOOD. MORE IMPORTANT TO THE QUAI IS
THE DAMAGE ALL THIS HAD DONE TO CANADIAN SENSIBILITIES,
WHICH IS BELIEVED IS CONSIDERABLE. SENIORS AT THE QUAI
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NOTE IN PARTICULAR THE ACTIVIST ROLE JUSTICE MINISTER
PEYREFITTE PLAYED IN THIS AFFAIR. GREATLY ADMIREDBY
GISCARD, HE UNDOUBTEDLY WAS INFLUENTIAL IN HAVING HIM
TAKE OFF THE BRAKES.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: VISITS, POLITICAL LEADERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 07-Nov-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977PARIS32527
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770410-1123
Format: TEL
From: PARIS USEEC
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19771188/aaaacxkh.tel
Line Count: 386
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: abb65a20-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 8
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 QUEBEC 424, 77 MONTREAL 1803
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19-Jan-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 689042
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LEVESQUE'S VISIT TO FRANCE CONFIDENTIAL CONFIDENTIAL
TAGS: PGOV, CA, FR, (LEVESQUE, RENE)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/abb65a20-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009